

SEIZURES (EPILEPSY)

What is a seizure?

The brain is full of electrical activity. It is how the brain ‘talks’ to the rest of the body. If there is abnormal or excess electrical activity in a part of the brain it can cause a misfire and result in a **seizure** or **convulsion**. People who have reoccurring seizures are said to have **epilepsy**. This is not a disease but rather a word used to indicate recurrent seizures.

What can cause a seizure?

Sometimes the cause of a seizure is never known. However, in most cases the cause is likely to be caused by one or more of the following:

- High fevers in children (102 degrees or higher)
- Epilepsy, a brain disorder
- Brain injury, tumor or stroke
- Electric shock
- Poisons
- Infections of the brain or nervous system
- Reactions or overdoses to medication or drugs
- Snakebites
- Reaction to vaccinations
- Alcohol
- Choking
- Heart disease
- Heat illness
- Toxemia in pregnancy
- Medication withdrawal
- Low blood sugar

What does a seizure look like?

Seizures fall into two general groups: **general** and **partial**. A **partial seizure** affects small parts of the brain. A **general seizure** affects the whole brain and can cause loss of consciousness and/or convulsions. This is the type that most people think of when the word ‘seizure’ is mentioned. This type of seizure is also called a **tonic-clonic** or a **grand mal seizure**. The important thing to know is that for most people with epilepsy, their seizures usually look the same. **Knowing how the person you work with looks or behaves when they are having a seizure is very important in order for you to be prepared to keep the person safe during and after the seizure.**

Some typical symptoms of a general seizure (tonic-clonic) are:

- Drooling or frothing at the mouth
- Grunting and snorting
- Tingling or twitching in one part of the body
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Sudden falling
- Loss of consciousness
- Temporary absence of breathing
- Entire body stiffening
- Uncontrollable muscle spasms with twitching and jerking limbs
- Head or eye deviation (fixed in one direction)
- Aura before the seizure which may be described as sudden fear or anxiety, a feeling of nausea, change in vision, dizziness, or an obnoxious smell.
- Skin color may be very red or bluish.

Some typical symptoms of a partial seizure are:

- **Glassy stare or rapid blinking**
- **Give no response or an inappropriate response when questioned**
- **Sit, stand or walk around aimlessly**
- **Make lip-smacking or chewing motions**
- **Fidget with or pick at clothes**
- **Appear to be drunk, drugged, disorderly or psychotic**



SEIZURES (EPILEPSY) CONTINUED

Most seizures last from a few seconds to five minutes. Again, knowing how long a seizure usually lasts for the person you work with is very important so that you will know when to seek emergency help if it lasts longer than usual.

What should you do when someone is having a Tonic-Clonic (Grand Mal) seizure?

During the seizure:

1. DO remain calm, be a good observer. Speak calmly and softly to the person.
2. DO help the person into a lying position and put something soft under the head.
3. DO turn the person to one side (if possible) to allow saliva to drain from the mouth. (If not possible during the seizure, do so once the seizure has stopped).
4. DO remove glasses, loosen ties, collars and tight clothing.
5. DO protect the head and body by clearing the area of hard or sharp objects.
6. DO NOT force anything into the person's mouth or between their teeth.
7. DO NOT try to restrain the person. You cannot stop the seizure.

After the seizure:

1. DO arrange to have someone stay nearby until the person is fully awake.
2. DO clear the airway of saliva and /or vomitus
3. DO NOT offer any food or drink until the person is fully awake.
4. DO document the seizure including what happened just before it started, what happened during the seizure, how long it lasted and how long it took the person to recover.
5. DO report the seizure according to your agency procedures
6. DO allow the person to rest. Most people will sleep soundly for a period of time following the seizure.

What should you do if someone is having a partial seizure?

During the seizure:

1. DO remove harmful objects from the person's pathway or gently guide them away from harm
2. DO NOT try to stop or restrain the person

After the seizure:

1. DO stay with the person until they are fully alert
2. DO NOT offer any food or drink until they are fully alert
3. DO allow the person to rest or sleep
7. DO document the seizure including what happened just before it started, what happened during the seizure, how long it lasted and how long it took the person to recover.
4. DO report the seizure according to your agency procedures

CALL 911 IF:

- The seizure lasts for more than 5 minutes
 - The person has one seizure right after another
 - The person appears to be injured
 - The person does not regain consciousness
 - This is a first time seizure
 - The person color remains poor
 - The person does not start breathing within one minute after the seizure has stopped
- (Start CPR)**
- The seizure looks very different from the person's usual pattern